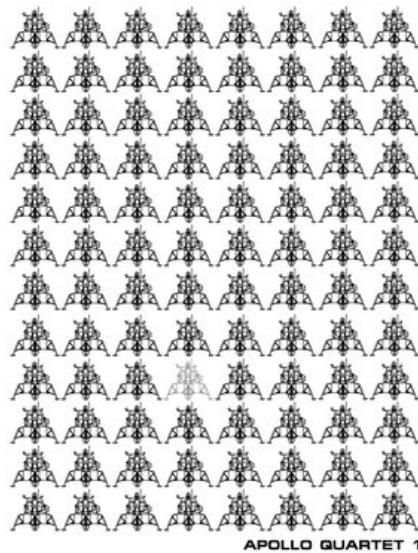


ADRIFT ON THE SEA OF RAINS
IAN SALES



Adrift on the Sea of Rains

Ian Sales , Jeffrey Schmidt (Narrator)

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When a nuclear war breaks out and the nations of the Earth are destroyed, it maroons a group of astronauts on the Moon. Using the "torsion field generator", they hope to find an alternate Earth that did not suffer nuclear armageddon. But once they do, how will they return home? They have one Lunar Module, which can carry only four astronauts into lunar orbit...

Adrift on the Sea of Rains Details

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From Reader Review Adrift on the Sea of Rains for online ebook

Steven Poore says

If British science fiction has been in the doldrums of late, then perhaps Ian Sales is launching it - almost single-handedly - back into orbit. *Adrift...* is hard as nails, grim and bleak as well as full of the joy and wonder of frontier exploration. Peterson and his fellows, exiles on the moon, disintegrate both physically and mentally just as their Earth has done, and the packed paragraphs reflect the claustrophobic nature of the story. The accuracy of the detail in the science and research is highlighted by the contrasting presence of The Bell, the story's cheeky nod to "handwavium" - but where some authors might make more of the Wunderwaffe, Sales very sensibly concentrates on Peterson's epic voyage home. And there's more to discover in these few pages than in most multi-volume sagas: hidden beneath the surface is an entire invented history, leading the reader to look back into our own world's canceled Apollo missions and wonder what might have been...

If anybody still believes that science fiction has nothing to offer to modern literature, they should be smacked around the head with this book.

Tudor Ciocarlie says

Interesting hard-SF novella that it's a must read if you are, like me, fascinated by the Apollo program.

Ole Imsen says

Sales's novella is very Hard SF one, but as it becomes clear rather quickly it is set in an Alternate History. This may seem like being a contradiction, but Sales manages to make it work very well. Interestingly it is neither the Hard SF nor the Alternate History elements that are the best thing in this story. What stands out most is the feeling of desolation and claustrophobia that Sales conveys through his writing. There is an underlying tension to the whole of this, that together with the chilling Alternate History scenario in the background makes for a very eerie read.

Being a fan of Alternate History, I care about how "what if..." scenarios are presented. It doesn't matter how interesting an idea the diversion from our history is if there's no plausible way to get to the alternative world that the story contains. Fortunately, that is not a problem here. Sales presents a future that seems to be just a flicker of coincidence away from the history we know.

There is something that has to be mentioned about the Hard SF in this novella, namely that it very easy to argue that there is none. This may sound a bit strange of me to say when I have already stated that this is "very Hard SF", but the SF is only Hard SF in the Alternate History setting of the story.

If you, like some people I have seen online, argue that Alternate History is Fantasy, rather than Science Fiction, then this would be a Fantasy novella. As someone who has a strong interest in History, I would say that Alternate History is without a doubt Science Fiction (, i.e. scientific speculation about how history could have diverged), and thus I don't hesitate to say that this is a Hard SF story in an Alternate History setting. Without going into spoilers, I will say that there is an element that isn't very realistic. But in the way it is

handled here that is not a problem. Rather it feels as an integral part of the alternative timeline of the story, and in my opinion doesn't detract anything from the Hard SF feel of this novella.

The story itself is very well written. Sales manages to convey a lot in a limited amount of space, especially the worldbuilding is excellent. Most of the history of this timeline is presented in its own passages, as retrospectives. I found this to work very well, they add to the main storyline without being disruptive to the flow of the story.

I've already mentioned the tension of this story, and that builds nicely as the narrative moves along. It's never clear what is going to be the conclusion to this tale, and the ending comes with a very satisfying twist.

There's no doubt that this story will be a great read for those who are fans of Hard SF, and the Alternate History elements make it worth picking up for fans of that genre. Its connection to the Apollo program will also make this a good read for anyone interested in real world human space exploration.

This review was originally published on my blog: <http://weirdimage.blogspot.com/>

David Hebbelthwaite says

Colonel Vance Peterson and colleagues are stranded on their moon base, trying to find a way home. Well, not 'home' exactly, because the Earth they knew has been destroyed in nuclear war. Rather, the crew of Falcon Base are using a piece of mysterious Nazi technology to reveal alternate versions of Earth from branching points in history, in the hope that one will be hospitable – and that they'll be able to travel there.

What I knew in advance about Ian Sales' fiction was that he was interested in combining a literary approach with proper hard science; I think he's pulled that off in this novella. He gives a sense of the technicalities of space travel and life on Falcon Base (part of the alternate Apollo program sketched out in the book's extensive glossary), as well as evoking the desolation and psychological effects of being isolated as Peterson's crew are.

Most interestingly for me, Sales plays the literary and scientific idioms against each other. The accoutrements of living in space stand for restriction (for example, anger is not so easily expressed when you're in low gravity and can walk only as well as Velcro slippers allow), but those technical terms also represent the astronauts' comfort zone, the sphere where they know what they're doing – and this is what ultimately turns against them. Sales has three more novellas planned in his 'Apollo Quartet' – I look forward to seeing where they head.

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

3.5 stars. This novella reminded me pleasantly of reading Tiptree, right down to the ending. Something about the era, I suppose. Some of the technical jargon and acronyms got tiresome, but will appeal to people who love the Apollo mission era.

Andy Angel says

The general scenario for this had me from the offset - A small group of men, engineers, scientists, military, stranded on the moon as the Earth dies in a nuclear holocaust. The once 'Big Blue Marble' is just a dead grey orb. The only hope of salvation lies with a 'gadget' that may help them find an alternative/parallel Earth. If they succeed, though, will they be able to reach it with their limited resources and what kind of Earth will they find?

This is a tightly written and tense, atmospheric book. I don't tend to use phrases like "not a word wasted" but in this case I will. There is a sense of loss and desperation amongst the men that is palpable. You also get a backstory of the lead character that fills in the details of what leads up to the final days of life on Earth

I will say there are a lot of abbreviations both scientific and military but worry not, there's a glossary at the back. And, to be fair, you do get a good idea of what the abbreviated things are so you probably won't find yourself looking everything up.

Not a long book but a lot of story all the same, and just the right length. As the first in a quartet it does the job by making me want to read the rest.

A job well done

Berit Ellingsen says

Commander Vance Peterson has been stuck on a base on the moon for two years together with eight other astronauts after the Earth annihilated itself in nuclear war. Each astronaut is handling the difficult situation in their own way. A strange device made during WW2 enables the castaways to find alternate Earths in the sky. When they finally see an undamaged Earth, with a space station in orbit around it, the astronauts must find a way to leave the moon and get help from the other Earth.

Adrift In A Sea Of Rains is a rare mix of realistic and more speculative science fiction. Everything is described in impressive detail; the lunar environment, the base, the equipment from the Apollo-program, the spacecraft, the aircraft, and late 20th century history. I can't imagine all the research that has gone into it.

Just about the only thing that is not realistic is the alternate universe device. However, the contrast between the speculative and very realistic science fiction feels a little jarring. That's mainly caused by the device's title, a "Wunderwaffe", which brings up images of silly space blimps and Nazi flying saucers in my mind.

Apart from that, I enjoyed the realism of the story, the harsh setting and the different variations on "the right stuff"-personality of the characters a lot. The portrayals are brief, but interesting, and I would have liked to see even more of the astronauts' interactions, even though they are not always friendly.

There are also many beautiful descriptions of the harsh environment and the situation, such as "Peterson sits at his desk in the command centre, mapping the boundaries of his cabin fever."

" - leaves the spacesuit like a victim on the floor,"

"Scott has put away his personality, consigned it to some corner of his mind where it cannot be battered and bruised by their slow descent into despair."

These descriptions are more personal and lingering than one often finds in SF, and I found them deliciously effective. Sales' confident and somber voice fits the theme and setting perfectly.

The finish has a nice twist, although it feels a little rushed, and is an exciting cliffhanger for the next part. I am now very curious about what will happen in the rest of the quartet.

Tony says

I've read a few short stories and a Space Opera novel by Ian Sales and I find his writing to be enjoyable and informative so I was looking forward to reading this book. I'm not going to get too technical with my review. Mainly because I'm not very good at that, but mainly because Lavie Tidhar does it much better than I could in his review. Instead I'll go with my usual simplistic style.

I'm going to start by saying something controversial. Ian Sales reminds me of J.R.R. Tolkein. Don't laugh, let me finish. Tolkein invented entire languages just so he could write his books. It is that dedication to research which shines through everything the author writes, but this work in particular. We gain a glimpse into this through the glossary and reference sections that are included at the back of this book. There is a serious amount of science fact in this fiction. In some ways this story is so believable that there is an eerie feeling about it. The story is set on the moon and captures the desolations and isolation that life on such a base must engender very well. At times I could feel the depression leaking out of the book and in to me. This depth of emotion was a surprise to me in this kind of short story. I did not see the last line coming but it fits perfectly and is the only way it could really end. The whole thing is tied together by the last word. Don't peek before you get there.

Flicking through the book you may be surprised that only half of the book is the short story. Somehow though each page seems to contain about a page and a half of writing. It is not particularly fast paced and full of action but the tension is palpable all the way through. Tonight I'll be choosing some of the terms in the glossary to read up on and I will certainly look up some of the references over the next few weeks. This book is hard work for a short story but the pay off for any science and military geek is well worth it. Even if you don't enjoy the story this book opens so many doors to new reading experiences that it would be churlish not to buy it and have a look.

Nerdsfeather says

Adrift of the Sea of Rains follows the decaying fortunes of a group of American astronauts stationed on the Moon in alternate-historical version of the late Cold War. The United States and Soviet Union have, in this timeline, done the unthinkable, and nuked each other (and the rest of the world) to oblivion. While this might ultimately doom the stranded astronauts, they have in their possession a Nazi Wunderwaffe called the Bell, which can cycle through "evolutions--alternate dimensions in a physics apparently ruled by M-Theory. The astronauts use the Bell to search for a version on Earth in which nuclear Armageddon has not, in fact, already happened.

Sales intersperses this story (told in present tense) with the (italicized and past-tense) recollections of protagonist Commander Vance Peterson. These segments tell the backstory of war, and Peterson's role in it,

in some detail, though Sales never leaves character perspective, and thus mercifully keeps us safe from the horrors of infodumping. Throughout these sections Sales sprinkles little details about experimental aircraft that, judging from the appendix, are based on real Pentagon projects from the Cold War. It's all very nerdy, in the best possible sense of the term...

Read the full review at [Nerds of a Feather, Flock Together](#)

Ian Hocking says

The first book in this quartet sets the tone nicely: a disaffected astronaut, one of several, is marooned on the moon, and the only hope of returning to Earth lies in a strange device called a torsion field generator.

This story is short, but beautifully written and immaculatively researched. You still get a lot of bang for your buck. Sales sets up some wonderful resonances - but I won't spoil it for you.

Overall, a great read, and exactly the kind of science fiction I'd like to spend my time reading: accessible, ambitious, genuine, and thoroughly researched.

Maryam says

Interesting but a bit dry.

Christian says

Apollo 16's LM ascent stage Orion approaches command module Casper, 23 April 1972

Look. Really - LOOK. Here is the *literal* apogee of human endeavour - a spacecraft, just lifted from a foreign celestial body, journeying home to that blue smudge hanging in the blackness beyond. Have you ever seen anything so *achingly analogue*? No, forget analogue - this is borderline *steampunk* - crumpled paper-thin skin, a guidance system with less computing power than your labradoodle's pacemaker and the perfect beauty of shape and finish dictated by function not aesthetics. Move along Jonathan Ive, move along, nothing for you to see or do here...

Growing up with the space race meant that Apollo was and is my porn, my heroin - a flawed and perfect endeavour - either the greatest single act of our species, or the most pointlessly expensive piece of Cold War dick-waving possible, or both, or neither.

Apollo-themed fiction though is relatively rare - at first glance it seems a narrow, limited palette for an author, with little potential for teasing out new narrative journeys. This then is the challenge that Ian Sales has taken on and met with *Adrift on the Sea of Rains*, an intriguing little curate's egg balanced somewhere between a short story and a novella.

There's a lot packed into very few pages here - deft flashbacks reveal how we got to the novel's opening page

- abandoned astronauts on the lunar surface with a lifeless, post-armageddon Earth hanging above their bleak horizon.

Front and centre is Colonel Vance Peterson - an unreliable and, as the novel unfolds, increasingly unlikeable character whose extreme, jihadic anti-communism and total belief in his cause's righteousness may just have led him, and our species, to this point. Peterson and his crew are simply *existing* in a primitive lunar habitat, watching their food and air dwindle - still technically alive, but really - in essence - dead.

Oh goody, I do like the total abandonment of all hope and joy in a novel - it's *The Road*, in a vacuum, without even a shopping cart for comic relief. But curses, that's not where Sales is taking us. There's a MacGuffin - the astronauts' only hope is a Nazi wonder weapon that might or might not be able to open alternate timelines and histories.

Mid-read, this didn't work for me - it all seemed too easy - feckless, lazy, welfare-scrounger writing. Wrong Christian, sooo wrong. Y'see, the thing about alternate timelines is that Your Mileage May Vary - not every one is, how can I put this? *divergent*... This reader was happily fooled by the *Twilight Zone* sleight-of-hand Sales deploys to deliver his ending - not quite sucker-punched, but pleased I hadn't smart-arsed-it-out - *Adrift* is almost fable-like in places - you need to just go with it and not Poirot too much at the decisions and actions of the characters.

The story stops dead at 71% on the Kindle, denouement delivered. That's cheeky I thought, but this is no scam - *Adrift* is a little acronym-heavy in places, so an abbreviations list is a necessity for those poor souls who don't know the difference between a TEI and a TLI (you really don't want to get them confused). The genius here though is how this simple appendix then arcs into a brilliant reworking of the Apollo timeline we know, extending it out and onwards towards the one which Colonel Peterson and his crew stand at the end of. Keep reading people - it's a lovely structural conceit.

Sales describes this as part one of an "Apollo Quartet". More of the same will do just fine, thank you Ian.

The Apollo Image Archive

The picture that opens this review is taken from the Apollo Image Archive, which is definitely worth a good clickaround. Oh, and btw - that's not a batch-processed Instagram retro filter you can see applied to the whole collection - it's *history*.

Lianne Burwell says

This was an intriguing little book about a group of astronauts stranded on the moon when the US and USSR go to nuclear war and destroy the world. However, they also have a Nazi-made (?) device that lets them slip between alternate worlds. They are hunting for a world that hasn't destroyed itself; one where the US still exists and has a space program. And preferably before they run out of food or go crazy (there's already been several suicides). But will they find what they are looking for?

I won't give away the ending (there's a twist!), but as a fan of the space program, I found the appendix as interesting as the story, if not more so, as it outlines an alternate space program that didn't shut down the moon program after Apollo 17, but also headed straight into a world-ending war.

The story, unfortunately, seemed a little... unfinished. It definitely should have been longer. Instead, there's a twist! and then it stops, with no follow through.

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

Literary-Hard-SF: "Adrift on the Sea of Rains" by Ian Sales

I've been getting pushes from a lot of my SF buddy-reading friends to tackle the Quartet series (the 4 books). Here I'm limiting myself reviewing-wise to just the first book for now (more later on). What we have here is SF at its finest. If there's a heaven and a hell for SF works, this one definitely belongs to the high spheres. The novel's subject matter: The Apollo programme went much further than in reality, and it was also used to establish a reality-shattering technology that aimed to switch between universes. Seems easy and belonging to the mundane spectrum of SF, right? No.

You can read the rest of this review elsewhere.

Rob says

...Just as Sales promised, *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* does not include implausible special effects or over-the-top space-operatics. A very deliberate choice by the author, the story could easily have contained some big explosions or 'pulse-pounding' action scenes. There is no shortage of such stories in science fiction. Some of the events are quite dramatic but the distance to the characters, Sales' acronym laden prose, and the way in which he writes dialogues makes the drama appear understated. It makes Sales' literary quirks stand out and shifts the reader's attention to some of the more subtle things going on in the background. There is a lot going on in this novella stylistically. It's a piece that needs and deserves to be read carefully. If Sales manages this kind of quality writing in the remaining three parts we'll end up with something special indeed.

Full Random Comments review
